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Reports from the 1990 Professional Seminar

TEEN TAPES: A PILOT STUDY

by Robert Sornson, Ed.S.

Bob Sornson is supervisor of special education for the Jackson County Intermediate School District. He worked as a high school special education teacher for twelve years, and has the freedom to try new approaches and teaching tools, including Hemi-Sync®.

The *Teen Tapes* is a series of twenty-four tapes intended for use by teenagers and educators, focusing on issues that confront teens today. Using the Hemi-Sync technology, these tapes offer twenty-five to thirty-minute learning and relaxation sessions for use in school or home. Mr. Sornson described the Teen Tapes as "... a fun project with educational application of Hemi-Sync for teenagers." He has taken a "whole life" approach in the design of the *Teen Tapes*, addressing personal, family, social, and academic issues. An introductory music tape compares the mood-altering influences of rock, classical, and easy-listening selections, keying into the emotional effects of music. The introduction also explains to teens that they will be able to learn with their whole bodies and minds, and provides an overview of the Hemi-Sync technology present on the tapes.

A life- and mind-threatening experience years ago sparked Mr. Sornson's interest in the quality of education. While managing a fruit farm shortly after graduation from college, he was poisoned by a pesticide used on the trees, resulting in a tremendous amount of neurologic damage. Struggling to regain his mental and physical faculties during the slow recovery, he became interested in neurology and neurobiology, particularly vestibular and hearing problems. Still considerably impaired, he returned to school and received a degree in special education. His learning impairment taught him empathy, but not sympathy, for the difficulties of the children he worked with. Refusing to support a low expectation of his students' abilities, he noticed that special education kids "have incredible capacities for learning."

The neurology of thought processes and the way in which Hemi-Sync affects it is of particular interest to Mr. Sornson, and he began considering pragmatic applications, "ways to make Hemi- Sync effective for kids and to improve [an educational] system which needs it." As a district supervisor of special education, he enjoys a great deal of freedom from many of the review procedures that are necessary in a system of regular classrooms. Parents, teachers, and administrators are looking for "what works" for the students and are therefore more open to innovation. Public education, Mr. Sornson explained, is highly bureaucratized and resists any change of climate.

An innovative educator, Mr. Sornson does not consider himself a researcher. When he approached TMI about the Teen Tapes project, his intention was to create a system which can be easily and effectively used in the classroom; a system to enhance learning and social skills as well as to give kids a tool for increasing self-esteem and relaxation. The result is a set of tapes, scripted and voiced by himself, and containing Hemi-Sync and appropriate sound effects embedded at the Institute lab. The pilot tapes were completed last winter. Since then several educators have been using the Teen Tapes, both in classroom and one-on-one situations.

“Some kids are willing to fight to listen to Hemi-Sync,” Mr. Sornson said, discussing his early experiences with Hemi-Sync in special education. He told of two hyperactive boys with attention deficit disorder who came from dysfunctional families. Both boys had been labeled emotionally impaired. Entering a classroom, he encountered the youngsters ready to come to blows over who would listen to the *Retain-Recall-Release* tape from the MIND FOOD series. “That had an easy solution,” he said, “anybody who fights doesn’t get to listen to the tape.” Hemi-Sync, he noticed, had a positive influence on kids’ behavior, including changes in self-concept and relaxation. Its noninvasiveness and ease of use renders it more attractive than many other techniques.

Introducing other children to Hemi-Sync, it was noticed that the effects seemed to last even after only three weeks of listening. The results with kids with poor cortical integration were incredible. These children are characterized by showing disjointed movement and difficulty focusing, often the cause of self-concept problems and poor attitudes toward learning. From his observations of students’ improvement, Mr. Somson concluded that Hemi-Sync can affect basic neurology, stimulating cortical integration and whole-brain learning. “Good learning is whole-brain learning,” he said. “Sensory integration must occur on all levels of the brain . . Other techniques for aiding cortical integration include encouraging children to use both sides of their bodies, physical play, and “patterning” specific body movements.

The Hemi-Sync *Surf* tape has aided several children. One autistic child was able to sleep at night for the first time. An emotionally impaired six-year-old experienced relief from a sleep disorder and improved her ability to relate interpersonally. The evidence of specific behavior changes demonstrates hemispheric synchronization and sensory integration, which led Mr. Sornson to believe that “Hemi-Sync helps the brain to communicate with itself better.” Using the Hemi-Sync tapes *Surf* and *Energy Walk* with a school wrestling team contributed to the team qualifying for wrestling finals for the first time.

The *Teen Tapes* were scripted to address issues important to teenagers. The first series addresses self-concept, and deals with building positive self-esteem toward success in school and life. Success in school is the focus of the second series. The third series approaches goal setting and solutions. Methods for building skills to deal with peer pressure, drugs, and sex,

among other issues, are offered. These tools are relevant even at the junior high school level and are also appropriate for adults. The fourth series focuses on creativity and harmony. Additionally, morning and evening tapes for teachers are included.

The tapes are designed to be presented sequentially, series by series, with each exercise being used three or four times. During this pilot, Mr. Sornson hopes to identify any “bugs” to be worked out in the series. After appropriate changes are made in the *Teen Tapes*, a more formal study will be initiated. So far, he explained, most of the feedback he has received from educators participating in the pilot has been very positive but lacking in critical comment.

A community-based training facility dedicated to teaching work skills to kids with IQs of thirty to fifty has been using the *Teen Tapes*. The facility’s goal is to insure that as many of their students as possible will be employable as adults. Generally, about three or four graduates of the facility per year are ready to move on to vocational training programs. After exposing the kids to the tapes three times a week over three months, fifteen children were ready to attend vocational training. Two or three children in a day treatment program as an alternative to institutionalization have been introduced to the *Teen Tapes*. Reports indicate that they are progressing academically as a result. A fourteen-year-old blind child is using the tapes to cope successfully with his impairment. Another fourteen-year-old with a history of mental illness and institutionalization was able, for the first time, to recognize her need for help before reaching a crisis point. The tapes have been credited with precipitating this change. Students using them within the athletic department have shown improvement in sports and academic performance.

An interesting by-product of the study with children has been the response of educators to the teacher tapes. One previously dysfunctional teacher with a negative attitude is now operating a functional classroom and seeing progress. Her outlook and performance have improved considerably.

The challenges ahead, suggested Mr. Sornson, will be to: 1) manage the bureaucratic obstacles to getting Hemi-Sync into school curricula; and, 2) develop educational products which can have an immediate impact. Approaching the students is easy, he said. “You just lay it out real simply and give kids a choice.”

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